



National Center for **Research** on  
**Rural** Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed)

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## Rural Education Research Digest

Isernhagen, J., & Harris, S. (2004). A comparison of bullying in four rural middle and high schools. *The Rural Educator*, 25, 5-13.

Bullying has both direct and indirect effects on children. Research has shown that those who are bullied suffer lower self-esteem, more absences from school, higher rates of depression, increased isolation, learning difficulties, and greater susceptibility to bullying others. In addition, some research has shown that bullying occurs more often in small schools than large ones, though few studies have focused on bullying in rural areas.

This study involved 394 middle school students and 419 high school students attending rural schools in the central United States. Students completed a questionnaire developed by Harris and Petrie (2002) via revisions of Rigby and Slee's (1995) Peer Relations Questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed the frequency and locale of indirect and direct exposure to bullying. Results revealed that 92% of middle school students and 88% of high school students observed bullying at school at least "sometimes" or "often," though more middle school students (50%) reported being bullied than did high school students (37%). However, middle and high school students reported experiencing bullying in similar ways, with both asserting that (a) name-calling and teasing were the most prominent forms of bullying, and that (b) bullying most often occurred in the classroom and during extracurricular activities. Middle school students reported seeing bullying most frequently (i.e., more than 70% of the time) in the lunch room, during a recess/break, during extracurricular activities, and in the classroom, while high school students observed it primarily (i.e., more than 70% of the time) in the classroom and during extracurricular activities. Most students reported that experiencing bullying "did not really bother them," but 10.3% of middle school and 7.8% of high school students indicated feeling "sad and miserable." Moreover, 23.2% of middle school and 17.6% of high school students indicated feeling "mostly angry." Overall, middle school students were more likely than high school students to tell someone about being bullied.

The authors concluded that bullying is a prevalent concern for rural schools. They suggest earlier interventions for aggressive behavior and more supervision in areas that have higher frequencies of bullying. The authors encourage rural administrators and teachers to be more aware of bullying in their schools and to engage students in ongoing dialogue about the issue.